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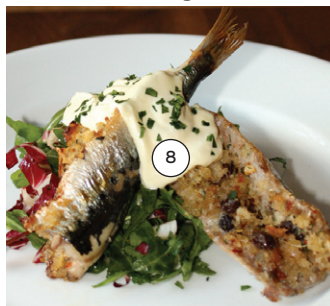
The Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink
— Fall 2010 —



Distilled genius



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GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CHARLES RUSSO

Manna for cheapos

Never bemoan the fate of the San Franciscan foodie who vows to keep it real. Certainly all around us lie the fruits, meats, starches, pastries, and corkage fees of capitalism. But here, too, is manna for the cheapo soul. The coily gruff pastrami chef at the corner sandwich shop; the garage-ensconced late night neighborhood Korean grubby; spicy, sweet treats that give you a taste of fancy without breaking the bank. Even the hottest new-new can be sipped for a song: nanobreweries that offer by-donation pouring parties, and distilleries where sips of inventive eau de

vie and verte absinthe can be tiptoed for free in the tasting room. Even without mentioning the friendly price tags, it all sounds like an insider's guide to SF dining. Harken friends, for it is. Welcome to the fall 2010 edition of Feast: the Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink, which almost by happenstance wound up highlighting high-class mouthfuls that go down easy on an empty wallet. Such is the richness of city life. Now go eat, you look thin.

Caitlin Donohue
Fall Feast 2010 Editor
caitlin@sfbg.com

Distilled genius

By Virginia Miller
virginia@sfbg.com

It's a thrilling time in Bay Area spirits. The same players who've made us proud in years past continue to reinvent themselves, while newcomers add flavor — literally — to the scene. In visits to four local distilleries, I came away inspired by their inventiveness and skill. And while none of the spirits I tasted use extracts or flavorings (like many of their big-brand counterparts), they do manage to fit in countless pounds of local, unexpected fruits, even natural herbs. Even more exciting to the small batch booze enthusiast? Most of the following distilleries open their tasting rooms by schedule or appointment so the tipling public can discover for itself the motto emblazoned on the bottles of Old World Spirits: "Good stuff needs no special effects."

ST. GEORGE'S SPIRITS

At the mighty St. George, inventiveness reigns, with a rock star attitude to boot. The distillery's small staff experiments broadly and distillers Lance Winters and Dave Smith drive this license into genius. A behind-the-scenes journey through their labs unveiled nothing short of a wonderland apothecary: test tubes and bottles of spirits flavored with herbs, fruits, vegetables, foie gras — even beef jerky. You may (rightly) love their eaux de vie, absinthe, agave spirits, rum, vodkas, and whiskeys, but have you heard they're toying with a carrot brandy? Clear and vegetal, it showcases the essence of the orange vegetable with a delicate hand. We can only pray they'll bottle this one.

I also sampled St. George's bourbon aging in charred American white oak that was a few years away from being officially bottled. Only five months young and made from the required minimum amount of corn (it needs at least 51 percent to qualify as bourbon) plus barley, crystal malt, wheat, and

rye, it's full of malty, rich promise. The same holds true of its white dog (clear-white whiskey) made from the same grains — one we could possibly see sooner on the shelves.

St. George's next single malt whiskey, Lot 9, has been aging five to 12 years in barrels blended with 17 woods, including used American bourbon oak, sherry refills, port refills, and French oak. If you're lucky, you soon may be able to purchase (in limited quantities) a single malt-single barrel selection that has been aged eight years in bourbon barrels then finished for four years in French oak apple brandy barrels. It is a wonder of complexity compared to their regular whiskey releases.

Only the brave attempt to down the scorching fire that is St. George's in house habanero vodka. Grown men confessed of crying or throwing up just sipping it — only a handful of people have downed a legitimate amount and have been permitted to sign the distillery's bottle of the burn. But my name is on that bottle — no tears, no throwing up, just a raging habanero sizzle.

2601 Monarch, Alameda.

(510) 769-1601.

www.stgeorgesspirits.com

CHARBAY

On a winding road above St. Helena and under peaceful Spring Mountain pines, there's more going on than this distillery's impeccable line of vodkas. Thirteen generations have gone into this family business, founded in 1983 and run by Miles and Susan Karakasevic, their son Marko, and his wife Jenni. The distillery's lineage is evident to the discerning tippler who sips their port, rums, pastis, brandy, grappa, wines — even their herba-ceous tequila. Charbay's father-son distilling duo traveled to Mexico to painstakingly learn traditional tequila-making technique, which they expertly riff on to make their distinct blends.

Don't even get me started



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY VIRGINIA MILLER

on Release II of Charbay whiskey! 110 proof, aged six years with a pilsner beer base, it's a stratospheric \$325, but one of the most exceptional things I've ever tasted. From its astounding complexity, I caught everything from hops to echoes of the pine trees surrounding the distillery. I also sampled an unreleased 12-year version of Release II: higher proof, rich, a stunner.

But there's no rest for the Karakasevics. Future whiskeys are already aging in French oak barrels — the one I'm most thirsty for, a stout whiskey, won't be ready until 2012. If early tastes are any indication, it's already brilliantly complex with coffee, spice, and dark chocolate notes. Made with neighboring Bear Republic's stout in copper alembic stills, it'll age for two years to reach 90 proof and is expected to retail around \$90 — part of a younger, more affordable line of whiskeys compared with the divine but costly Release II. The bold explorer spirit that propels Charbay to

Mexico to make a fine tequila shines in their future whiskeys.

TEMPUS FUGIT SPIRITS

These importers have already made waves with their Swiss-produced Gran Classico Bitter, which I hailed for reinventing classic cocktails like the Negroni. They also import some of the best French and Swiss absinthes in existence. Absinthe historians and spirits experts Peter Schaf and John Troia are the masterminds behind Tempus Fugit — and owners of one of the finest vintage absinthe poster collections in the world. It was a thrill to check out these rare pieces while tasting the history and forward-thinking vision in their bitters and liqueurs.

Tempus Fugit's modus operandi is reinventing classic recipes and distilling them locally. Petaluma-produced Liqueur de Violettes is next up for the duo, a taste along the lines of Creme de Violette and other violet liqueurs yet somehow unlike any of them. Made with less sugar, the liqueur

CONTINUES ON PAGE 6 »

Distilled CONT.>>

is a more appropriate cocktail ingredient — it's less cloying, more purely floral and light. Each time I sample it, its bouquet blossoms like a layered wine: a sophisticated, botanical aperitif.

Tempus Fugit's future project (a two-man team, after all, only has four hands) is Crème de Cacao-Chouva, a chocolate liqueur that will change chocolate cocktails the way St. George's Firelit transformed coffee liqueur. It's dark, lightly sweet, lush and earthy. Tasting it, I envision a resurgence of my guilty pleasure cocktail, the Grasshopper, refined and grown up with Crème de Cacao-Chouva and crème de menthe. It came alive with soda water — an elevated egg cream soda materialized in my cocktail windshield.

Keep an eye on these guys. They have more spirits and biters as exciting as the ones I've listed in the works. Their diz-

yzing knowledge of the history and intricacies of forgotten or neglected spirits, along with refined taste, suggests revelatory possibilities for the future pours of Tempus Fugit.

(707) 789-9660,

www.tempusfugitspirits.com

OLD WORLD SPIRITS

Just north of San Carlos in a nondescript smattering of office buildings, is Old World Spirits, which has been in production since 2009. Davorin Kuchan, its third-generation distiller from Croatia, says family plays an irreplaceable part in the operation, as is evident from the photos lining the walls of the distillery. The whole clan is involved — Kuchan's young daughter even drew the girl peeking out from foliage that graces Old World's playful absinthe label. The output of both Davorin and business partner Joseph Karakas is astounding for a two-person operation, with two absinthes, a gin, a black walnut liqueur, three eaux de vie/brandies, and more liquors slotted for future release.

Old World uses custom-made German stills and local fruits like the Indian blood peach, which Davorin calls the "heirloom tomato" of stone fruit. Though he grew the peaches himself in Croatia, in California Davorin orders in from Placerville's Goldbud Farms. The clear blood peach eau de vie impresses with notes of ripe, juicy fruit flesh and spicy skin. I found Old World's eaux de vies well-balanced, both the pear-inflected Poire Williams and the three- to seven-months oak-aged O'Henry Peach. I sipped a raspberry eau de vie it has yet to release: clear and lightly floral, free of the cloying sugar common in raspberry liqueurs.

Watch for Old World's sold out dark black walnut liqueur — another batch is out in two years. Kuchan's Blade Gin stocks the shelves of many a Bay Area bar, a California-inspired gin route with whispers of ginger, citrus, cilantro, lemon verbena, and black cardamom. Two kinds of absinthe,

a green (verte) and clear blanche/white (referred to as Bleue, as in Switzerland), take cues from classic absinthes but resound with Davorin's interpretation of 20 percent more herbs than what enlivens a traditional absinthe. Old World's next release: a Cognac-style double barrel brandy aged in French and American oak and finished in Kentucky bourbon casks, which they hope to release soon. My early taste straight from the barrel yielded an already rich, spicy brandy.

Thirsty yet? Visit Davorin and Joseph during their monthly Friday Flight nights. Davorin will turn on some fine French pop tunes as both pour spirits, transforming the distillery into a warm familial party.

121 Industrial, Belmont.

(650) 622-9222.

www.oldworldspirits.com **SFBG**

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Eat. Drink. Ride.



5 far-out sammies

We SFers have such an abundance of cafés and restaurants to choose from that it's easy to get panicky — *Where am I? I haven't seen a restaurant in feet! I'm hungry! What will I eeeeat?* — when we stray a few blocks outside a foodie greenbelt. At times like these, don't close your eyes, click your ruby slippers together, and repeat, "There's no place like the Valencia corridor ..." "Because if you do, you'll miss some of the best unsung and out-of-the-way sandwich places the city has to offer. Not only do these places dish up some tasty, thoughtful sandwiches (at prices reminiscent of the '80s), their off-the-beaten path locations mean that you never have to suffer lines of hipsters and potbellied tourists determined to score the latest pundit-anointed dagwood "as seen on TV." Trust us, if you find yourself at any of these outback corners, you're not lost, you're saved. **(Diane Sussman)**

CALABRIA BROS.

Across from FedEx and next to the Russian Gospel Temple on an industrial corner of Potrero Hill, Calabria Bros. is North Beach without the north (indeed, the compass puts it 131 degrees southeast) or the beach, or the supporting cast of oleaginous waiters. Inside this small Italian grocery/deli are what appear to be three generations of Vinnies manhandling (in a good way) the various types of cheese and salted pig parts. The bros also cook a daily special — Thursday is stewed sausage and red pepper; Friday is chicken parmigiana — and make their own ravioli. But whatever sandwich you choose, the brothers will ask if you want their homemade garlic spread. Say yes.

2249 17th St. at Utah.
(415) 863-1213

M&L MARKET

M&L, six words, yo: Twitter, people, Twitter! Signage, people, signage! While not exactly an obscure location (it is, after all, a block from both Market and

Church streets), M&L has done its best to make itself obscure. Like not having a sign outside, the hard-to-see-through windows, the six-month junkets to China without so much as a tweet goodbye, the 18-hour work weeks. But once you're safely inside, you'll be won over by the briny smell of M&L's pastrami, the acknowledged *specialite de la maison*. Everything at M&L is terrific (if perhaps a tad old-fashioned — when's the last time you saw tuna and egg salad together in a sandwich?). But beware the ordering protocol. Select your bread first. I don't say this lightly — failure to do so will result in a reprimand. M&L didn't get the nickname Sandwich Nazi for nothing. Bonus points for offering liverwurst. 691 14th St. (between Landers and Market). (415) 431-7044

PETE'S DELI & CAFE

Pac Heights, Shmac Heights. For reasons unknown, Pete's always gets listed as a Pac Heights place, although it's hard to imagine that Heightsters really want to claim this downscale section of Diviz as their own. But Pete's has occupied the space for 41 years, becoming something of a working stiff's icon in the process. (With Kaiser and UCSF-Mount Zion as neighbors, it's not uncommon to be waiting in line behind the person who squeezed your nuts or pancaked your bosoms for a mammogram 10 minutes earlier.) With good reason: Pete's is the kind of true-blue sandwich joint that salt-of-the-earth types revel in. No figgy marmalade or goat cheese with arugula here — just recognizable meats and cheeses, customized to your biases. Pete also roasts a turkey every day and carves it warm — what's more true-blue than that? 1661 Divisadero. (415) 931-4800

ALAMO SQUARE MARKET AND DELI

Talk about obscure locations,

CALABRIA BROS.



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

Alamo Square Deli isn't even on Alamo Square, and isn't even on a corner. Set in the garage level of a house on Scott Street, Alamo Deli is the quintessential, *Cheers*-style neighborhood bar substitution: the guys who work there know everyone who comes in, what their sandwich is, and how they like it. All the sandwiches are good, but the real artistry of the place resides in Alamo's signature rock star tribute sandwiches. Two deserving of honorable mentions: the Green Monster (pesto, feta, roasted pepper) and Zibbity Bop (turkey, avocado, pepper Jack). 353 Scott. (415) 861-7120

COURTNEY'S PRODUCE

Courtney's is the perfect waystation for those times when

you can't quite face walking four more blocks to the Castro District or just want to escape to Corona Heights. Courtney's doesn't make its sandwiches to order, but that's no cause for demerits. Because let's face it, waiting — even for minutes — is overrated. By 9 a.m., the up-and-at-'em staff has its sandwich act together. Quick sellouts include the chicken on crusty baguette, the peanut butter and jelly on cinnamon bread, and the turkey. If you're the type who shuns premade sandwiches for fear of icky, drippy mayonnaise, don't worry: Courtney's makes no-mayo versions of most of its sandwiches. Courtney's gets bonus points for fresh-squeezed juices and liverwurst sammies. 101 Castro. (415) 626-1850 **SFBG**

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5 sardinerias

When it comes to sardines, you have to think outside the earthquake shelter. On the flavor-o-meter, the tinned food of last resort (served on tarps with Saltines and stale water) bears no resemblance to its wild, fresh self. Even a humble sardine doesn't deserve to be jammed in like a sardine, oil slicked, and left to age in the farthest reaches of the cupboard.

As several San Francisco eateries are ably proving, sardines, when treated with respect, are a tasty addition to the dining table. And healthy. And sustainable (they're on the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Super Green list!) Everyone from Andrew Weil to the Italian grandmother we all wish we had proclaim the virtues of the pungent silver herring. And with good reason: its tiny, 25-calorie body is packed with essential fatty acids, iron, protein, and calcium.

Let's face it, the good people of Sardinia didn't get their beautiful skin and convivial personalities from eating *schweinebraten* on *spätzle*. They're all high on EFAs. Sardine EFAs. **(Diane Sussman)**

PESCE

Pesce was one of the first and finest restaurants to introduce San Franciscans to the joys of sardine cuisine. The casual Russian Hill restaurant offers small plates of fish, pasta, and vegetables (and please, can we call it *cicchetti*, as they do, instead of "Italian tapas"?) patterned on the cooking of Venice. Pesce serves its sardines (all from Monterey Bay) simply — grilled, on a bed of mixed greens and pickled vegetables with a wedge of lemon. The result is tart, briny, and clean. If you're still on the fence about sardines, Pesce is the place that will convert you to a bona fide a-fishyanado.

2227 Polk, SF. (415) 928-8025.
www.pescesf.com

RAGAZZA

In Provence, *shmeur* means aoli. They put it on meat; they put it on vegetables; they put it on fries; they put it on fish. Heck, they probably put it on ice cream. At Ragazza, the new relative of Glen Park's Gialina Pizzeria on Divis, the chefs splat a huge dollop of it on its sardines. Apart from the aoli, Ragazza takes an Italianesque approach, stuffing them with an earthy mixture of breadcrumbs, olive oil, garlic, oregano, and onion and baking them in the restaurant's gas-fired Wood Stone oven. The result is a crispy exterior over sardines that almost melt away on the fork. Add some mixed greens and a robust Italian red and you can practically feel your arteries unclogging. Oh, Ragazza also has pizza.

311 Divisadero, SF.
(415) 255-1133.
www.ragazzasf.com

NOPA

There's locavore, 100-mile radius locavore, and there's ultra-locavore, five-mile radius locavore. While most of the city's sardine-serving restaurants get their sardines from Monterey Bay, Nopa gets its from our very own San Francisco Bay. This is great news because our local sardines nearly went extinct in the 1950s. And — sardine cognoscenti consider the Pacific sardine as flavorful as those on the Sardinian coast (take that, overpriced cans from Norway). Speaking of flavorful, Nopa serves the little San Franciscans baked in its wood-fire oven with fingerling potatoes and frisee. The only thing missing is an order of flatbread, a gems salad, wine, and the burnt honey crème brûlée.

560 Divisadero, SF.
(415) 864-8643. www.nopasf.com

BARBACCO ENO TRATTORIA

You have to give Barbacco

RAGAZZA



credit. Unlike most of the restaurants that have rediscovered the sardine, Barbacco doesn't seem to be operating on the principle that sardines are an after-5 p.m.-only food. Although not exactly in the let's-have-herrings-for-breakfast! camp, Barbacco at least believes that noon is a perfectly reasonable time to start the jonesing. The bustling, suits-heavy Financial District eatery is the creator of what may be the city's only sardine sandwich (if this isn't true, we'd like to know). Barbacco also breaks the don't-get-too-weird-with-sardines taboo, pairing its sardines with a hefty piece of seared calamari. Not most people's first choicem perhaps, but the two get along swimmingly, especially when served on an Acme torpedo roll and slathered with arugula and Barbacco's housemade "roasted tomatoe condimento."


220 California, SF. (415) 955-1919.
www.barbaccosf.com

FERRY PLAZA SEAFOOD

When you don't want others dictating what you can and can't have on your sardines, duck into Ferry Plaza Seafood. This celebrated purveyor of all things aquatic sells wild, locally caught sardines (and by this we mean our our SF as well as Monterey bay) when available. "We love sardines," said one salty staffer. "Especially the local ones. They just glisten." They recommend bringing out the glisten by brushing with olive oil, salt, and pepper; grilling a few minutes on each side; and dressing with lemon. Call first for availability, these guys swim in and out of supply.

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www.ferryplazaseafood.com **SFBG**



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The new, new nanobrew

By Caitlin Donohue
caitlin@sfbg.com

The newest trend filling steins doesn't mark a huge change from the norm — in fact, it's pretty nano. Nanobreweries, to be exact: a model of DIY suds start-ups that's allowing beer entrepreneurs to build their empires just the way they like them. Enterprising beer nerds, you've hereby discovered the brewpub version of underground farmers markets.

"One day we'll open a real pub, and if you find your photo on the wall you'll get a free pint," said Richard Brewer-Hay (yes, that's the name he was born with) as he showed off the pub-appointed Noe Valley basement room that houses his Elizabeth Street Brewery (www.elizabethstreet-brewery.com). Daughter Addison,

a precocious four-year-old, plays on the ground next to us as we sip a stout concocted by Brewer-Hay in the very same room — we just checked in with her sister, Quincy, on her way to bath time upstairs.

Nanobreweries are, in effect, the domains of beer makers caught between formidable brewing habits and starting their for-profit commercial operation. The Hess Brewing Company website volunteers that the definition of a nanobrewery is production of 10 to 75 gallons of beer annually. It estimates that there are 44 nanos in the country, with 21 in the works. Nanos can't sell their own beer without undergoing the same kind of expensive brewpub permitting process, so most keep their beer available on a by-donation basis — making for



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

a real good party if you can get an invite.

Brewer-Hay, who moonlights as a blogger for eBay, began brewing seven years ago. Natural hosts, he and wife Alyson would offer his American-style, English-inflected beers at their neighborhood-famous Super Bowl parties. They named their brews after members of the family: Firecracker Red for the ginger-haired Addison; Daddy's Chocolate Milk for the stout that Brewer-Hay

is partial to (and that we sit sipping). Recently bottled, it has a smooth, light taste. Also, like most of Elizabeth Street's creations, it is low in alcohol.

At first, Brewer-Hay's small batches were purely a labor of love. But as his brewing skills expanded, the family's parties did too, first to 150, then 200. Word spread, until one day he looked around and "didn't know anyone in the room." He realized he had hit on something and started to

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PACIFIC BREWING LABS

consider the shift to opening his own brewpub.

His business plan inspiration? “We’re going back to the public house,” he tells me as we sit on stools amid photos of family and friends lining the walls. (All the images contain at least one drink in the frame — “that’s one of the prerequisites,” he says.). He wants to sell his own beer alongside the city’s best buffalo wings and grilled cheese sandwiches. Primarily, though, he wants

“families to be able to come, have a few beers, and still be able to function.”

He’s well on his way to realizing this vision, with no small thanks to the social networking the nanobrewery model lends itself to. Aspiring tipplers score invites to Elizabeth Street by responding to Brewer-Hay’s announcements of upcoming pourings on Twitter. Lately the nano gets visitors from across the country: beer brewers and dedi-

cated drinkers who have heard of Brewer-Hay’s skill, or perhaps caught news of his partnership with 21st Amendment brewer Shaun O’Sullivan, which lead to a high-alcohol version of the beer Brewer-Hay named after his grandfather. Their bitter, Imperial Jack, won a gold medal at the 2010 World Beer Cup.

Across town in SoMa, a nano buzz is fermenting at Pacific Brewing Laboratories that is a little less bedtime and a lot more nightlife. The brews are being crafted by hand by young pups Bryan Hermannsson and Patrick Horn (www.pacbrew.blogspot.com), two skinny fellers in their early 20s. Hermannsson is a bioengineer whose previous nano-project, Clara Street Brewing, introduced him to the enthusiastic Horn. Their project inhabits a sparse side street garage, that since 2009 has been crammed with a younger crowd of hop heads at PBL’s keg-tapping parties.

What’s special about Pacific’s vibe? Surely the nano’s unconventional flavors — Szechwan peppercorn, goji berries, and chamomile have all been included in their bubbling brews. Pouring parties serve as share-and-tell time for the duo, who will wax on about their latest hibiscus saison until they’re interrupted by its wort bubbling out to the floor by their feet.

“Beer connects you with people in many ways,” Hermannsson says. The two are hoping to start a brewpub of their own in the future, a fact they don’t hide from the potential investors who make it to their parties. “That’s how you get on your feet. People come, you throw free events,” Bryan says. “It’s a great way to test recipes,” Patrick interjects. Fellow partygoers, each holding a glass of one of PBL’s four beers being poured that night, undoubtedly wouldn’t offer a nano of dissent. **SFBG**

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GUARDIAN PHOTO BY BEN HOPFER

7 burrito-free late nights

We're spoiled rotten living in the city where if you fling an ankle boot, it's bound to hit a taqueria open past last call. Its like a burrito vortex — go out in San Francisco and at some point you will get wrapped up in flour tortilla and snuggle in with your old buddies, carnitas and shredded cheese. But gooey and warm as it is in there, you must resist the pull to turn into a burrito. I know, I know, we're gonna hold your hand through this one. We've assembled the meeting places for Burritos Anonymous: purveyors of snacks so fine — and open at least until 1 a.m. on weekends — that your frijoles negros withdrawal-twitches will subside and your post-bar, pre-bed caloric intake will rejoin your regularly programmed San Francisco culinary adventuring.

We're talking calamari bulgogi, vegan smoked duck sandwiches, chilaquiles, pambazos, and beef brisket with a side of cucumber salad. We're talking late night. Clip this page and store it near your bus fare. **(Caitlin Donohue)**

TOYOSE

There's a converted garage in the heart of the Sunset District stuffed with carousing young'uns into the wee hours. Its charmingly narrow dining area has enough foliage and hanging screens between tables to hide 1 a.m. sloppiness — and enough Korean delicacies to entertain the most rabble-raising group for hours. Try their noodle dishes, which can feed four with their toss-it-yourself mounds of veggies, cold rice noodles, and chile sauce. House favorites

include the seafood pancake, kimchee fried rice, bulgogi, soju smoothies, and the damn largest bottles of Korean lager seen this side of the Pacific. Open until 2 a.m. daily.

3814 Noriega, SF. (415) 731-0232

NOMBE

A hip *izakaya* whose name roughly translates to “he who doesn’t remember the walk over.” Nombe’s menu can be bogging, but that doesn’t detract a smidge from the table of pickled daikon, stewed onion pork belly, steaming bowls of ramen, and sake flights that is apt to materialize after speaking with the friendly serving staff. Motor skills eschewing spoons and forks for the moment? Play swords with something off the tasty skewer menu. Open until 2 a.m. weekends

2491 Mission, SF. (415) 681-7150.
www.nombesf.com

REACTION RESTAURANT

When the owners of all-ages art-punk venue Sub-mission decided to open up a dining room next door, they kept it accessible. Reaction’s got a menu full of little-seen Mexico City specialties that won’t break the bank of their underage clientele, but still don’t relapse into the boring realm that sub-\$5 food often falls. Our favorite is the pambazo, a roll that’s been dipped in red sauce, grilled, then stuffed with your choice of meats or beans. You’ll also find huaraches, gorditas, and burgers — all in a sleek, red and black ambience that won’t harsh your buzz. Open until 3 a.m. weekends

2183 Mission, SF. (415) 552-8200

J & V CAFE

There’s late night, and there’s late night. If the sun’s coming up and you’re not ready to mix and mingle with the morning suits, head to Bayview. Not that J & V will be filled with drunken sops like you — a well-turned, few-frills cafe located in the middle of SF’s wholesale produce market, the work day here begins in the dark of the night. Standard diner fare, decent espresso, a

few quality Mexican specials — no b-words, but plenty of heaping chilaquiles plates to palliate that come-down. 1 a.m.-2 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

2095 Jerrold, SF. (415) 821-7786.

www.jandvcatering.com

THE LIBERTIES

A place that takes no liberties with the notion of good pub food available when you need it most. The Liberties offers stomach-liners like mashed potato-topped cottage pie, bangers, and Anglo-happy chicken curry for those who’d rather have their biggest meal of the day post their biggest pints of the day. Open until 2 a.m. weekends

998 Guerrero, SF. (415) 282-6789.

www.theliberties.com

TOMMY’S JOYNT

With an exterior decorated in shades of circus tent, the 63-year old legend is a great place for Mom’s cooking at hours Mamma woulda freaked had you started rustling around in the kitchen. Hofbrau service has you line up with a tray and point to which braised meat and starch you’d like heaped on your plate. Beef brisket? Buffalo stew (their specialty)? Veggiesaurus? No worries. Scoops of pasta salad, greens, and potatoes await. Open until 1:40 a.m. daily.

1101 Geary, SF. (415) 775-4216.

www.tommysjoynt.com

LOVE N HAIGHT DELI & CAFE

Stating the obvious: vegans get short shrift when it comes to late night. Seriously, how often can you order the same thing Carnivorous Carl is having ... minus the protein and sauce? Unfair. Pay it no mind — with Love N Haight’s head-whirlingly large menu of vegan (and some meat) sandwiches, you’ve got the upper hand. Sure, the fake roast duck may taste similar to the fish and the chicken — but its a chewy, satisfying kind of same. Open until 2 a.m. weekends.

553 Haight, SF.

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6 hot C-cups

A funny thing happened on the way to adulthood: hot chocolate became interesting. Remembered by most Americans as the insipid, lukewarm, desiccated powder-based drink of ice rinks (often dispensed from a machine that simultaneously squirts water and dark matter into your cup), 21st century big-kid hot chocolate has heat, depth, spice, richness, variety. It is, in short, both *hot* and *chocolate*. And let's not forget innovations in topping technology. Today's hot chocolatiers don't open a bag of petroleum-based white things or spray on the ReddiWip — they make their own marshmallows and whipped cream.

Hot chocolate is also one drink you never find yourself saying, "If only I hadn't had that last (fill in cocktail) ..." "Indeed, researchers at Cornell found that hot chocolate has more antioxidants per cup than red wine or tea. So as we enter hot chocolate season — our summer, which they call "autumn" on the rest of the continent — raise a cup to your health.

(Diane Sussman)

BOULETTE'S LARDER

In the third season of *Dexter*, top cop Maria has a pair of bonding experiences with women that are consummated with two words "ganache frosting." Ganache — that rich, delicious, thick, delicious, dense, delicious mix of chocolate and cream — is the base element of Boulette's singular cup of Eastern European-style hot chocolate. All day long, Boulette's chefs keep a pan of molten ganache simmering in anticipation of its HC fans. The result is hot chocolate so thick you almost need a spoon, and so satisfying you can omit that dollop of cream.

One Ferry Building # 48, SF
(415) 399-1155.

www.boulette'slarder.com

COCO LUXE

This pretty-in-pink Haight Street anomaly makes eight kinds of

hot chocolate (including a green tea version for serious antioxidant-counters) plus a milk-free drink for all those people who can't, won't, or don't swing bovine. Billed as warm chocolate pudding, the molten concoction blends dark chocolate and hot water until it's only navigable by spoon. Like our beloved Earth, it also retains its molten core, so it can be toyed with for some time without losing any of its hot, thick mojo. Coco Luxe also has solid chocolates, gorgeous ones that look like mini wall art. And let's face it, we all need a little solid food occasionally to add weight and depth to our c-cups.

1673 Haight SF. (415) 367-4012.
www.coco-luxe.com

CHRISTOPHER ELBOW CHOCOLATES

When the abundant novelty of SF's innovative hot chocolate scene has worn off, head to this sleek corner store for even more innovation. The boutique chocolatier, which originated in Kansas City, Mo., has all the customary spicy, dark, and milky brews you'll find at many of our other HC providers — along with some never-before-seen variations spiked with ginger, curry, and coconut milk. Christopher Elbow also makes powdered versions of some of its best-selling drinking chocolates, which make a lovely nyah-nyah-nyah gift for friends still living in Hershey's just-add-water-powdered-packet land.

401 Hayes, SF. (415) 355-1105.

www.elbowchocolates.com

FIVE STAR TRUFFLES

You gotta love this under appreciated one-man operation, where the one man makes your cup by shaving generous helpings of his superlative block chocolate into every liquid cup. The price is right — \$2.75 for 16 ounces — and the one man always offers one of his handmade truffles on the house. The one man also exhibits a sincere liberalism about how much milkfat is really



necessary for hot chocolate. If you want nonfat hot chocolate (no judgments!), so be it. With base chocolate this good, you won't miss the milkfat.

411 Divisadero, SF.

(415) 552-5128.

www.fivestarttruffles.com

BI-RITE CREAMERY

Although most people waiting in line at Bi-Rite see only the ice cream and soft-serve, hot chocolate heads can't help but notice, tucked as it is on the counter behind the cookies, *la machine*. A combination hot plate-whirligig, Bi-Rite's single-purpose hot chocolate machine (rumored to have been developed by SF's own Recchiuti) keeps its brew in a perpetual state of warmth and agitation. What does this mean, besides one terrific cup? No waiting! Traditionalists all the way, Bi-Rite uses only ground chocolate, cocoa, sugar, and milk. A word of warning, though: Bi-Rite only makes HC during the

winter (other people's winter) and on unusually cold or rainy days. Pray for rain.

3692 18th St., SF. (415) 626-5600.

www.biritecreamery.com

CHILANGO

Most people come to this Mexican restaurant — and rightly so — for the food. But if you're here and have postprandial room, you'll notice hot chocolate on Chilango's dessert menu, right up there with flan and churros. But like any good dessert, Chilango's hot chocolate takes time — the chefs stir each cup over the stove. Let's face facts, all the delicious Mexican and spicy hot chocolate around town originated from ... Mexican hot chocolate. Get the real deal here. And never forget that nothing brings out the flavor of churros like dipping them in hot chocolate.

5 Church, SF. (415) 552-5700.

www.chilangococina.com **SFSG**

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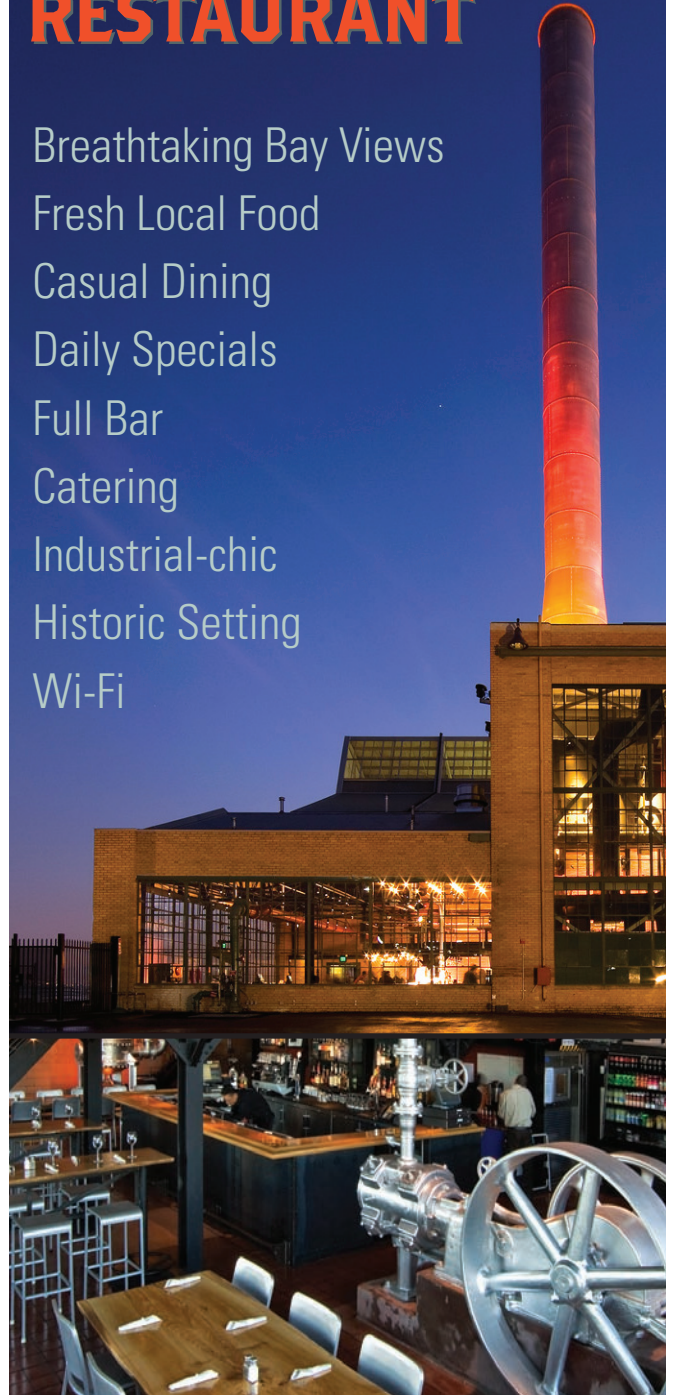
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